



MAURICE W. BLANCHETTE
First Selectman

STATE OF CONNECTICUT - COUNTY OF TOLLAND
INCORPORATED 1786

TOWN OF ELLINGTON

55 MAIN STREET - PO BOX 187
ELLINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06029-0187
TEL 870-3100 FAX 870-3102
www.ellington-ct.gov

JAMES M. PRICHARD
Deputy First Selectman

LAURIE E. BURSTEIN
A. LEO MILLER, JR.
LORI L. SPIELMAN
RONALD F. STOMBERG
JOHN W. TURNER

BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Wednesday, November 9, 2011
Town Hall - Meeting Hall

SELECTMEN PRESENT: Maurice Blanchette, Laurie Burstein [7:25], A. Leo Miller, James Prichard

OTHERS PRESENT: Doris Crayton, Director Human Services; Erin Graziani, Director Senior Center; Melinda Ferry, Human Services Commission Chair; Sue Hannigan, Morris V. Webber and Tom Dzicek, Senior Center Steering Committee; Yale Cantor, Human Services Commission; Carolyn E. Cook and Bill Enes, Senior Center Endowment Fund Committee; Mark Joyse, Jacques Dion, Alcyone S. Brennan, Marlene Marsh, Angela Sandberg, Pat Tardif, Maureen Webber, Bill Greene, Cathy Greene, Adam Krupa, Miranda Krupa, Doug Harding, Patti Gamble, Gordon Gamble, Erin Quinlan, Patch.com

PUBLIC HEARING: Petition Regarding Referendum to Fund the New Senior Center

First Selectman Maurice Blanchette opened the Public Hearing at 7:00 p.m. and read the attached legal notice. Mr. Blanchette said that in accordance with the Charter of the Town of Ellington a petition, as read, was signed by enough registered voters, therefore, this is a hearing; following, within 30 days, there will be a Town Meeting on this petition. No actions will be taken tonight, but this is an opportunity for those who wish to speak to be heard. Mr. Blanchette asked for each person who wished to comment to raise their hand and to state their name and address before speaking.

Sue Hannigan, 40 Ardsley Lane, said that she is going to make a statement on behalf of Wayne Reynolds and herself, as Mr. Reynolds is out of town. Ms. Hannigan said that the reason that the Senior Center Committee members went forward with a petition to require a Town Meeting on the financing of the new Senior Center is because Mr. Reynolds met with Mr. Blanchette, once the final conceptual design of the building was complete. Mr. Reynolds asked Mr. Blanchette when the Committee could expect a referendum. Ms. Hannigan said that Mr. Reynolds was told by Mr. Blanchette that it would have to take place after the referendum to finance the building of an addition to Crystal Lake School. The earliest Mr. Blanchette could conceive that the Senior Center financing could go to referendum would be next summer. It was not an acceptable timetable for the Committee, and they felt that it would decrease the likelihood that citizens would approve the funding of a Senior Center after approving more taxes to pay for the school addition. Ms. Hannigan said that the seniors of Ellington have been waiting a long time for a Senior Center and they would like one that is equal to what every surrounding town already has in existence.

After going through the records, it was discovered that voting senior citizens, age 60 and over, have paid \$6.2 million a year in Town taxes. They will pay \$124 million in taxes over the next 20 years. It is not unreasonable to ask Town citizens to approve a maximum of \$2.5 million of these taxes to be used to provide for the building of a much-needed new Senior Center in Ellington. That would be roughly 2% of the total taxes that would be paid over this time by the senior citizens. The Committee felt there was no other choice than to gather enough signatures on a petition requesting that the referendum for financing a new senior center be at the same time that the Ellington citizens will be asked to finance the addition to Crystal Lake School. It is the belief of the Committee that approvals of both important projects have the best chance of being accepted by a majority of voting citizens if they were combined, since most senior citizens will vote for the combined funding, as well as most parents of students. Ms. Hannigan said that it is a win-win proposition, and is not divisive. Doing it any other way would risk that one or both of these important projects will be turned down by voters. The Committee will ask attendees of the Town Meeting on this subject to vote for the combining of both capital improvement projects on the same referendum.

Yale Cantor, 20 Charter Road, said that he is not clear on what the next meeting will be about. Will it be to set a date for the referendum or to discuss whether or not there will be a referendum? Mr. Blanchette explained that, subject to checking by legal counsel, the fact that the petition came about and was signed properly and enough people signed it started a process that led to the Public Hearing. After this, within 30 days from today, the BOS must set a Town Meeting to vote "yes" or "no" on the petition. If the result is "yes", then whatever the petition says must be honored, and if it is "no", then the petition becomes void. There may be other things that need to go on, but as a result of the petition, that is what is required.

Morris Webber, 4 Lewis Circle, was under the impression that seniors 60 and older have paid in just shy of \$7 million in Town taxes. The seniors have been waiting a long time for a new Senior Center. Mr. Webber said that the seniors don't have children in school anymore, and some never had any children in school, but they paid their taxes all these years and supported education all the way. He said that not one senior is in favor of depriving the children of a better education, so they will keep on the tradition of supporting education.

Mr. Miller said it is his understanding that there would be no reason why the question couldn't be considered at the same referendum as the one for Crystal Lake School, and it wouldn't have to be in the future. Mr. Miller said that he happens to believe that it would be better to give the citizens of Ellington the opportunity to vote separately on each question. He said he doesn't see any reason why the two questions couldn't be handled at the same referendum, but as separate questions. Mr. Miller said that he indicated previously that it is premature to try to schedule this now and one of the reasons is, although he is not in favor of increasing the burden on the tax payers, he feels a brick veneer building would be superior to a frame building. He said that from the standpoint of durability, future maintenance and fitting in with the décor of the Town buildings, a brick veneer building would be better. Mr. Miller said that he feels that this needs to be studied before a final decision is made.

Tom Dzicek, 14 Windermere Village Road, said that the Committee is not concerned with the material that goes into the building; right now they are just looking for funding. He added that those questions and concerns will be answered once the funding is found. Mr. Dzicek asked what the purpose of a Committee is, that is not going to have an end result until five years down the road. He asked why the BOS put all of the people who are on the Committee through the process of visiting surrounding Town's Senior Centers, compiling all of this information and then are not willing to do anything with it. He said that if the BOS was not ready to move forward on the Senior

Center, then the Committee should have been formed in the future. He said it is ludicrous to think that the Committee will be receptive to waiting three years to move forward after all of the work they have done to get to this point.

Mr. Miller said that this could get resolved in 6 to 8 months, not 3 years. He said that his concern is that for the Town to go out and approve funding, it is imperative that they be as accurate as possible about what the needed funding will be. If \$2.5 million is put up now, and then it is determined that it would be better to go with the brick veneer building, then there will need to be an additional appropriation. Mr. Dzicek said that the Committee has been asked and directed by Mr. Blanchette to seek grants, and some of the grant applications require a commitment from the Town for the project, and that is ultimately what the Committee is asking for.

Melinda Ferry, 3 Jonathan Drive, said that on October 17, the conceptual design was approved by the BOS and she is not sure why there is a discussion tonight on the conceptual design. Mr. Blanchette said that a conceptual design is not a final design. He said that the conceptual design was requested by the Committee as a way to approach grant possibilities from foundations or from individuals. It is a normal process to come in with a plan, but that plan is not finalized until the funding is approved. He added that Mr. Miller has a point when he advises that it is important to make sure that whatever funding is requested is enough to cover the project. If it isn't, and the Committee has to come back for more money, it becomes a more difficult process.

Ms. Ferry said that the petition is written to have the referendum for both the Crystal Lake School and the Senior Center voted on together. If it is approved at the Town Meeting, does it have to be carried out the way that it was written or can it be separated, as Mr. Miller suggested? Mr. Miller said if it goes to the Town Meeting, and it is approved as a tag along to the Crystal Lake School, then that is the way the referendum will be worded. Mr. Miller said that the project will then be locked into the \$2.5 million, and it won't be clean if then it is determined that more money is needed. Ms. Ferry asked how long it will be before there is a referendum date? Mr. Blanchette said the school project is expected to go through the BOS and the BOF, and then to referendum early next year, simply because of the timing requirements for it to be presented to the State for consideration in next year's bonding package. It takes a year to hear from the State whether something is approved. So even though the request will be in by June 30, 2012, they probably won't be certain of the funding until June 2013, which means they cannot start construction until then, because whatever construction is done before they get approval from the Bonding Commission doesn't qualify for reimbursement. So, in terms of timing, it is likely to come to referendum in early 2012.

Mr. Dzicek said, to address Mr. Miller's question regarding the \$2.5 million, the estimate was provided by the architect who was in tune with all of the necessary items going into the construction of the Senior Center. He added that if the Town has to wait 3 to 5 years to start this project, the cost of construction very conceivably will escalate.

Mrs. Burstein arrived at 7:25 p.m.

Mr. Blanchette said that the Town approves the total amount whether it includes grants or not. So if it is for \$2.5 million, and \$1 million is raised in grants, it does not raise it to \$3.5 million; it would still be at \$2.5 million. Mr. Dzicek thanked Mr. Blanchette for clarifying the point.

Maureen Webber, 4 Lewis Circle, said that she is a senior, she has worked in the school system in Ellington and her children went through school in Ellington, and she does not want to pit seniors against elementary schools. She said the Town should be working as a team. She said the

citizens of Ellington are all a family and have to work together. If they don't get the senior center going, they will lose seniors from Town. She said the seniors don't want the kids to lose out, and they don't want to lose out either. The referendum has to be together, otherwise it will pit seniors against students, and that is not the intent.

Melinda Ferry said that there is a lot of evidence that this is a good time to go forward with the Senior Center. She said that the Town of Ellington has been designated a "Typical Town" and the Town deserves a Senior Center.

Ms. Hannigan said that the senior citizens are willing to go after grants. They have a wonderful Committee that has raised over \$50,000. She said that their hearts and commitment is there, but they are very frustrated by the road blocks. She said that they have worked hard and are very proud of their work, and the nicest compliment they received came from the architect when he said his job was made simple because of all of the work the Committee did.

Ms. Hannigan added that Ms. Graziani sends out her newsletter and calendar, and there is a holiday party coming up. The notice states that the first 40 people who sign up can attend the party. Ms. Hannigan said that maybe 140 people would like to go, but they can't because they don't have room. She said that there is no room for privacy for health care treatments so everything is done in front of everyone. She said that is not right; seniors are not cattle, they are your parents and your grandparents and we owe them something. She said they have earned the right to have a Senior Center that is decent that they can call home.

Mr. Cantor said that he is looking at people who have been recently elected and supported by the residents, and he said he recently read a part of Mr. Blanchette's positive campaign stating that he supports the schools and the new Senior Center. Mr. Blanchette said he did say those words and he still supports both projects; he just had a different idea of the timing. Mr. Cantor said that the seniors are afraid they are just words from politicians who are now in office, and he feels that there is a stall going on, and that is how it is being perceived by the people. He said he is trying to help out the BOS with their wording going forward since the seniors want to believe that the hearts and actions of the BOS members will take care of the Senior Center as well as the school.

Mr. Webber said that right now is the time to do construction. A lot of people are out of work and the construction trade is down. He also said that he feels that the bonding rate is the best the Town is going to get right now.

Miranda Krupa, 132 Windermere Avenue, said she volunteered at the Senior Center 15 years ago when it first opened. She said the project has been swept under the rug for years and years. She said that the residents of Ellington have spoken with their petition and with the funds that were raised through the golf tournament, and she feels that now is the time to move forward on this project.

Ms. Hannigan thanked Laurie Burstein for her service, since Mrs. Burstein will be leaving the BOS. Ms. Hannigan said that Mrs. Burstein was the BOS representative on the Human Services Commission for many years and was a delight to have and they are going to miss her. Ms. Burstein said that it was her pleasure.

Mr. Blanchette said that at the BOS meeting on Monday, November 14, 2011, a date will be set for a Town Meeting on this issue of the petition.

Mr. Blanchette thanked everyone for attending and for expressing their interests.

Mr. Blanchette closed the Public Hearing at 7:37 p.m.

Submitted by  Approved by 
LouAnn Cannella Maurice Blanchette